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BRIEFING

WHAT'S WRONG WITH U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES

The problems that plague the intelligence community are so deeply rooted that only fundamental changes can improve performance

BY ALICE GOODMAN

THE recent campaign for the White House marked the third straight presidential election in which the American intelligence community's performance was a major issue.

From their members it is clear that Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski all felt office-holding intelligence had not served them well.

Moreover, ever since the debacle in Iran the Senate and House Select Committees on Intelligence have been under continual criticism of the executive branch that they have received from the intelligence agencies.

An early in 1982, the Senate intelligence committee's investigation was overseen by Adm. Bobby Inman, the agency's most senior and respected career military intelligence officer. His congressional critics charged that he was responsible for America's intelligence and nuclear strategy until his retirement in 1980.

James told several audiences that the U.S. intelligence community's performance was at best mediocre, if not poor.

"It is in the wake of the Iraniasco that Congress has come to believe that our intelligence agencies have been less than fully effective," James said.

America's intelligence has suffered setbacks in terms of both private U.S. intelligence and, for example, about the Soviet threat to America's U.S. possessions (higher oil prices).

I failed to predict Soviet

President Mikhail Gorbachev's deployment of offensive missiles in 1982," James said. "I am not sure I did not know what I was talking about."

Intelligence and foreign-policy

professionals could tell me a great many stories, of the political correctness and anti-war bias they have generated.

Many intelligence operations

have left the profession wondering if the community has become



ILLUSTRATION: HERMAN COOK

too fragmented, sophisticated collectors, analysts and staff actually impeded the sharing of information. And rival agencies to staff committees for financing prepare divergent analyses that let systems talk past each other enough to confuse,延误, or compromise information to policy-makers.

Unfortunately, such problems have plagued the intelligence community for more than a decade and are so deeply rooted that only fundamental changes in the system will improve performance.

Intelligence Failures

The quality of intelligence provided by the community has been repeatedly tested over some time. There have been at least 10 alleged intelligence failures investigated by Congress or the press since 1980.

Since the White House has not permitted the director of central intelligence to release an annual version of the CIA's intelligence report, it is not known if it is true that the agency has rarely produced correctly the sum of force by one state to achieve its aims over another.

These failures include the North Korean attack on South Korea in 1968, the risk to the USS

bungle of the seizure of the Soviet embassy in Havana discovered in 1979. Such mistakes have all been extremely costly to U.S. security. Some of these failures led to major crises, like the Cuban missile crisis, others, such as the undermining of the Soviet nuclear buildup, led to complementarity about America's own arsenal and the need to moderate it.

U.S. intelligence agencies also have failed to anticipate military attacks and identify targets and targets in limited wars. The intelligence community had rarely predicted correctly the use of force by one state to achieve its aims over another.

In each of these cases, intelligence failure policy also was at fault. But to assess the policy-maker for the failure of intelligence professionals have done, would be a serious mistake.

However the policy-makers

reached their conclusions, they were guided by faulty intelligence analysis or poorly served by the state or incomplete dissemination of reports by the intelligence community.

The Iran Debacles

The most botched intelligence failure of the 1980s was the Iran debate. Actually, a series of failures along with a vacillating, policy toward Iran had led to the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in November 1979 and Computer virus America's economic and security interests in the region.

To be sure, as the commissioners who compiled the CIA's postmortem on Iran later discovered, not a single person in or out of government foresaw the ascent of Ayatollah Khomeini. Revolutions have

often been predicted correctly, but U.S. intelligence agencies often analyze fail even to assess risks.

The update came to Agency Center to read the following handwritten note to the Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Brasilia, and Director of Central Intelligence George Bush, Adm. Donald Rumsfeld, Vietnam:

"To C. Zieg, Please — I am not satisfied with the quality of our political intelligence. Analysis is incomplete and, at times, inaccurate, give me a report concerning our efforts in the most important areas of the world. Make a joint recommendation to improve our ability to gather political information and advice."

At the master level, new priorities

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When Pressure Forces a CIA Officer to Quit



ST. JOHN NORTON

criticism came from the director himself.

Nothing will get an umbrella of fire's heat faster than a claim of negligence. It is a kind of private pat that he not share blame for the decision to make them more pliable to be supporters or to recover the glory of approval on his watch.

Most intelligent officials think they know better than intelligence officers. Attempts to assess disloyalty, intelligence reports or judgments that don't live up to administration's policies have a non-purist provenance.

William Casey, the current director, does differ from previous directors in his insistence on

that he is a part of the policy-making group where Central America is involved as much as he is the president's chief intelligence officer. His predecessor had led to talk of a role to review the actions of future directors from the rear services to prevent political being put in the job.

That may appeal to an intelligence officer who has an unhealthy respect for our own virtue, but no legislature can ensure that a director, no matter how competent we are in our work, will not be put in the position.

We should hear the experience of those who have had good will and integrity. My last interviewee, an operator they consider to be wrong or incompetent. A taste of power may make us arrogant. The natural tension will continue.

If we accept this as inevitable, our aim should be to soften the culture. I propose that we do as follows: 1. Establish a panel of elders — a tribal council — as part of the public concern, that intelligence matters cannot be taken more seriously than the public interest and once the early days of the agency are not forgotten.

This council would sit with the director when he is besieged by the politicians, held in high esteem by the intelligence

from the point of duty, and talk quietly with other parties to see if the differences to either end and to sound warnings if the risks to be run seem not worth the trouble.

The council would be made up members of the few different organizations already charged with the task of evaluating the performance of the intelligence community and of the CIA in particular.

In the CIA there is an Office of the Inspector General that inspects the agency and acts as anombulatory ombudsman to complainants. The President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board is made up of private citizens appointed by the president.

Two other organizations charged with oversight of the intelligence community are the Senate and House intelligence committees. The informal exchange of information and views among their groups would provide an immense improvement.

What would begin as a pragmatic approach to supporting the integrity of the intelligence process could benefit from the participation of officials from State, Defense,

and intelligence is vital to our security. Our assessment of foreign policy makes policy makers more responsible for their actions and mistakes. Such a tribal council could build bridges over party lines, define real differences and increase the area of consensus that seems so far from our grasp today.

Washington Post
John Norton was a CIA operations officer from 1969 to 1973 and served on the National Intelligence Council from May 1980 to May 1983.

GREAT DECISIONS '85

Starting Next Week

Start your year with the first of the Great Decisions program, sponsored annually by the Foreign Policy Association. Next week at the beginning of the Great Decisions '85 program, which consists of eight weekly meetings in communities throughout America to discuss significant U.S. foreign policy issues.

Starting next week, the monthly Great Decisions report will focus on briefing sessions. The subject for discussion the first week will be "Revolutionary Cuba: Toward Accommodation or Conflict?"

Great Decisions '85 is sponsored locally by the World Affairs Council of Northern California in San Francisco and the Foreign Policy Association, a non-government, non-partisan educational organization.

Participants in Great Decisions will return their views in open debates discussions at the weekly meetings. The topics will be relevant and stimulating to members of Congress and the executive branch.

Discussion groups are still being formed and intelligence representatives for the weekly lectures are being accepted. Information on Great Decisions '85 can be obtained from the World Affairs Council, 555 Geary Street, Suite 2028/P.O. Box 8461, San Francisco, CA 94102.